

would warm the inside of my jeans by the gas heater. In first grade, I would read my lesson to her and she would write the teacher a note saying I had done my reading assignment. I remember her coming to the new house on Prospect Drive a few times, but not regularly. By that time, I was in junior high and high school."

During this time, Snooky and Mary Lou Williams and their three children—Charmie, Paul and Ben—moved to Water Valley to run Stubbs Department Store. Charmie (Weeks) remembers the ladies who looked after her hard-working family, both when she was a child and later as an adult.

"Maggie Lee Sanders kept us when I was a toddler," Charmie wrote. "We would drive to the country to pick her up. If I recall correctly, she lived at the end of a long dirt driveway off a country highway. She would hold Paul on her hip while she did housework. I remember her smile and her contagious laugh. Her daughter, Dorothy, was one of the first black children to come into our school system. She was in my class. We were able to reunite at our class reunion last fall."

Later, the Williams and Weeks families relied on Mildred Backstrom to take care of things while they were all at work, first at Stubbs and later at Everett Cock Insurance Agency.

Charmie continued, "Mildred Backstrom lived on the street behind the Crip Tyler family. She was wonderful. When court was in session, mother would have her cook a big lunch at our house to feed the out-of-town judges. When I moved home, mother and I used her full-time. She would go to mother's in the morning, clean and cook lunch. After lunch she would walk to my house on Dupuy and clean for me. She would have a wonderful supper ready at the end of the day for us. She was great with Angela and Matt. She moved to the Chicago area as she



India Throop and nurse Stella

got older to be with her family. We kept in touch until she passed away."

Camille talking here...

Jane Henry Crow, who at that time lived behind us, often walked down our street with Vinnie Wright, of whom she said, "All I really know is I loved her, and she loved me." One thing I remember about Vinnie myself is that Jane was so little and Vinnie, who was a large woman, would hold out her index finger, and Jane would hang onto it while they walked. They made quite a pair!

All of us in the neighborhood remember Ora Lee Wilson, who with her husband, Snook, also lived behind the Tylers. She officially worked for Buck and Mary Suratt and their son Bobby (all gone now), while Snook worked for Mr. Suratt at Blu-Bucks. Ora Lee looked after the rest of us as well in her "spare" time. I remember her babysitting for me at night sometimes, and even though I was probably old enough to stay by myself, I never complained because I loved her company. Her only problem was she wouldn't sit still and watch tv with me; Ora Lee always had to be up doing something. For some reason I remember her ironing our bedsheets, something you would never catch me doing today!

"Ora Lee was a great friend to Mamma when she was much older," said Jennifer Cofer Flanagan. Ora Lee and Snook had a son named Buddy who was about our age or a little older, and I remember Mary Brooks Tyler and me sitting in a treehouse in her backyard on summer afternoons, where we could hear poor Buddy being made to practice the piano.

I'm going to digress a little here and tell a story about Buddy, who—when we were small—got bit by a stray dog in front of our house. He rang the doorbell and was out front crying, and my mother brought him inside and set him on the edge of the bathtub, pulled down his jeans and swabbed and bandaged his leg, then gave him a ride home to Ora Lee's. That was a good lesson for me—love, respect and care flow, it turns out, in both directions.

Finally, I'll write about the women I grew up with. When I was a tiny girl, we had a maid named Elnora, and I'm sorry to say I don't remember her last name. I do remember her as old and grouchy because she fussed at me

a lot, especially while she was standing at the ironing board. Some years later, I mentioned to my mother that I couldn't remember Elnora when she was anything but out of sorts, and Mama straightened me out fast. "She loved you so much," she said. Talk about feeling pretty low and pretty guilty. I just hope Elnora is sitting up in Heaven today, knowing that I wish I'd gotten to know her better.

When I was older, Juanita Cox helped my parents a lot as they aged, but the housekeeper I remember best was Minnie Jenkins. Minnie also lived on Dupuy Street, a few blocks west of us, and she walked to work every day. My folks both worked at the bank, and my sister Harriet was at school already. So I got to spend a lot of time with Minnie when it was just the two of us. After I went to school, she was always around in the summer, and we had our time together then.

When I think of Minnie, what I most remember is that she helped me learn to read. My mother had gotten some beginning readers from Mrs. Afton Smith, longtime first grade teacher. They were about Dick, Jane, Spot and Puff, and Minnie and I worked on them every day so I could show off what I'd learned when Mama and Daddy got home from the bank. I faithfully read along with Minnie and learned every word in those books, imitating Minnie's southern black accent perfectly!

Another great memory of Minnie, that I have recalled many times was when her son and his family visited her from Waterloo, Iowa, and she asked me if I'd want to walk over to her house and spend the morning with her family. We walked over, and it was, oh, so hot. We didn't have air conditioning and neither did Minnie, so when we got ready to head back to my house, her son asked if we wanted a ride. He put me on the front seat between him and Minnie, and his car was air conditioned and oh, so cool. The ride was short, and I hated for it to end because that air was blissful.

When I tell this story about riding in his car, I always say that if he had said, "Little white girl, would you like to ride up to Iowa and live with us?," I would have said, "You bet, let's go!" It wasn't too terribly long after that when we got some window unit air conditioners for the house, and again, it was like paradise for Minnie and me. The only problem was when I got home from school, if Minnie had left and nobody else was home yet, I had to play in the yard till somebody got home. I can remember putting my face up to the mail slot by the front door so I could feel the cool air inside.

This doesn't have anything to do with Minnie, but when I was eight years old, I got a key to the house so I wouldn't have to wait outside for someone else to come home (Harriet usually had band practice, so she and I didn't get home at the same time.) That was a pivotal day in my life to be certain!

Eventually Minnie got too old to live alone, and her son moved her up to Waterloo. She'd write us occasionally, long rambling letters that often said "Smile" in parenthe-



This photo from the 1950s shows India and Carlisle Throop (right) along with other unidentified children and ladies.



Bobbie Hervey (above) during Christmas, 1969, at the Troop home on Market Street. She had retired but came over to prepare Christmas dinner.

ses, the way people today write "lol."

But then one day, we got the news that she had died. We didn't get to go to the funeral, but the next summer we drove to Waterloo to visit the cemetery and put flowers on her grave.

I don't have a photo of Minnie, but I have so many good memories—she was part of the village that raised me. Like Elnora, I hope Minnie is up in Heaven secure in the knowledge that I loved her like a second mother. My whole immediate family is gone now—my parents, my sisters Harriet and Barbara—and Minnie. But I'll always remember them with love and thanks for helping make me into the woman I am today.

(NOTE: If you can identify any of the women in the photos please contact Dottie Reed at 678.825.2356 or quaye_reed@bellsouth.net.)



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